Unit .32

Session .04

The Church Is United Under Godly Leaders

Scripture

2 Timothy 1:8-14; 2:1-7

8 So don't be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, or of me his prisoner. Instead, share in suffering for the gospel, relying on the power of God. **9** He has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began. **10** This has now been made evident through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who has abolished death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. **11** For this gospel I was appointed a herald, apostle, and teacher, **12** and that is why I suffer these things. But I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that he is able to guard what has been entrusted to me until that day. **13** Hold on to the pattern of sound teaching that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. **14** Guard the good deposit through the Holy Spirit who lives in us. ... **1** You, therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. **2** What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, commit to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. **3** Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. **4** No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in the concerns of civilian life; he seeks to please the commanding officer. **5** Also, if anyone competes as an athlete, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. **6** The hardworking farmer ought to be the first to get a share of the crops. **7** Consider what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.

Intro Options

Main Point:
God empowers church leaders to proclaim and guard the gospel.

Option 1

Your students work for a Christian TV studio. The executives want to create a show or movie about a Christian superhero or superhero team. They want your students to create pitches for the prospective superhero show. It should include the following:

Whether or not the superhero(es) will have a secret identity (some superheroes do, while others are open about who they really are) and why;

What superpower(s) the superhero (or heroes) has and how they will use it;

The source of the superpower(s); it could be a one-time deal like exposure to a chemical, or it could [illegible]r replenishing, like drinking a magical potion.

[illegible]hould be Christian, but that doesn't mean she needs to get her superpower by reading her Bible or fasting. There certainly can be an explicitly spiritual element to the superpower(s), but there doesn't have to be, so long as the superhero is a Jesus follower.

See what pitches they come up with. If church leaders were superheroes, what do the students think they would do? Would their identities be secret? What superpowers would they have? Where would they get them? In today's lesson, we'll see that church leaders are unashamed of the gospel (like some superheroes are unashamed of their identities), that their "superpower" is to guard the gospel through sound teaching, and that they get their strength (their superpower) in the grace of Jesus Christ.

In a large group, come up with a list of teams or groups working toward some goal: maybe an athletic team, an orchestra, a military unit, etc. Have your students get into small groups for skits, where each group will be one of the teams in the list.

Have each group create a three-scene skit showing that team in action. In the first scene, the group should have no leader; in the second, it should have a bad leader (or leaders); in the third, it should have a good leader (or leaders).

Let them prepare and act out their skits. Debrief by asking which was worse: having no leaders or bad leaders? Which was hardest to come up with? Which was easiest? Why? What did the good leaders have in common? What about the bad leaders? Today's session will talk about how God wants the church to be united under godly leaders.

TEACHING PLAN

Read 2 Timothy 1:8-12.

Timothy was bold about Christ and the gospel because of the power and character of God. Paul was imprisoned not for being a criminal, but for doing the work of the Lord. Therefore, Timothy had no need to be ashamed for his ministry partner. Instead, he continued doing the Lord's work and was willing to share in suffering himself. There is no reason to be ashamed when you are suffering for what is righteous. When fellow believers suffer for following Christ, our response should be solidarity, and our confidence should not be in ourselves, but in God's power and grace.

- **Why can we sometimes struggle to be unashamed of Jesus?**

Paul told a Roman citizen, Timothy, not to be ashamed of Jesus (who was crucified by Roman authorities) or of Paul (who was in a Roman prison awaiting execution). Instead, Timothy should be willing to suffer himself. The desire to be liked and accepted can overwhelm us. It is certainly a strong motivating force in much of our decision making, whether we realize it or not. The power to live unashamed does not come from within, but from above. It is supernatural to live in solidarity with the crucified Savior and His suffering saints.

Think of other Christians you know at your school. Try to think of some who are not in your friend group. Maybe they are not "cool," or don't fit the stereotype of your clique. Are you afraid to risk your social status to befriend them and show that you aren't ashamed to call them a brother or sister in Christ?

- **What can you do to show solidarity with other Christians who aren't in the "in crowd" or one of the "cool kids?"**

It can be a powerful witness to show our love for other believers even when it risks our social status. That is what Paul was calling Timothy to—a willingness to take risks in order to identify with Jesus and himself. We see similar examples throughout the Bible, especially in the Book of Hebrews. Moses "chose to suffer with the people of God" instead of taking advantage of his status as Pharaoh's grandson (Heb. 11:24-25), and some Christians endured "taunts and affliction" in order to care for believers in prison (Heb. 10:32-34).

- **What are some aspects of the gospel that can motivate us not to be ashamed of Jesus?**

The gospel is a powerful motivator for living out your faith unashamedly. Jesus saved us by His grace and has called us with His eternal purpose (2 Tim. 1:9). What courage and boldness the gospel gives to those who follow Jesus without shame!

Read 2 Timothy 1:13-14.

Christian leaders have an important role to play in preserving the gospel. This issue was at the very heart of the Protestant Reformation. There was an effort to recover the sound teaching that Paul had given to the early church and to guard the deposit of gospel truth entrusted to the church. But we can't hold on to or guard what we don't know.

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
God empowers church leaders to proclaim and guard the gospel.

2 Timothy

1:8-12. Paul uses the same Greek word for "ashamed" here that Jesus uses when He warns that whoever is ashamed of Him before others, He will be ashamed of them before His Father (Mark 8:38). It's the same word that the author of Hebrews uses when he says that Jesus isn't ashamed to be called our brother and that God is not ashamed to be called our God (Heb. 2:11; 11:16). Paul uses this same word in Romans 1:16 as well.

George Knight notes that "it is striking that Paul refers to himself not as Rome's prisoner, but as "his," i.e., the Lord's prisoner."[1] By saying this, Paul alludes to Christ's sovereignty even over his imprisonment and his confident hope that Christ will one day vindicate him as his obedient servant.

"When you read ancient Christians, you notice: We talk a lot about Christ sharing in our sufferings. They talk more about our sharing in his."[2]

1:14. "In entrusting the deposit to our hands, he has not taken his own hands off it. He is himself its final guardian, and he will preserve the truth which he has committed to the church. We know this because we know him in whom we have trusted and continue to trust."[3]

Activity

Break your students into small groups. Across the board, write, "How to _____ a Church Leader." Their first job is to fill in the blank; their second job is to make some kind of PSA (radio commercial, skit, paper guide, etc.) showing how to do whatever they chose. For example, one group might do "How to Be a Church Leader" and then do a PSA showing as much. Another group might do, "How to Support a Church Leader;" a third might do, "How to Pray for a Church Leader;" a fourth, "How to Submit to a Church Leader," and so forth. See what ideas they come up with and then what PSAs they make. Debrief by asking how they can put those ideas into action this week and this month for the sake of the unity of the church.

1. George W Knight III, The Pastoral Epistles (The New International Greek Testament Commentary) (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans; Reprint Edition, 2013).
2. Andrew Wilson, Twitter post, September 8, 2017, 7:52 a.m., https://twitter.com/AJWTheology/status/906138082780512256
3. John Stott and Lin Johnson, 2 Timothy: Standing Firm in Truth (Westmont, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2020)

99 Essential Doctrines (p. 72, DDG)

Edification

Edification refers to the progressive growth and maturity of the church, both individually and collectively. The Bible talks about different ways maturity, or edification, may happen, such as through the fellowship Christians share with one another (1 Cor. 12:26; Gal. 6:2). In addition, edification takes place through the church's preaching and teaching of Scripture (Eph. 4:11-12), helping people understand and internalize the whole counsel of God. In the end, edification is building up the body of Christ, equipping people to live on mission for the kingdom of God.

TEACHING PLAN

▪ What are some ways the church can preserve and hold on to the gospel for future generations?

The primary way we can continue to pass on God's word through the apostles is by studying and teaching the Scriptures. This is why we teach through the Bible. The Scriptures have been entrusted to the church, and we must steward them well. What a gift and privilege!

▪ What attributes should characterize Christian leaders as they stand firm in sound doctrine?

Paul said our holding and guarding should be done with faith and love and a dependence upon the Holy Spirit. Unfortunately, those who are serious about sound doctrine (and I would include myself in this too) often have a reputation for being harsh and unloving; but this is contrary to what Paul instructs Timothy. In 2 Timothy 2:24-25, he says, "The Lord's servant must not quarrel, but must be gentle to everyone, able to teach, and patient, instructing his opponents with gentleness…"

Jesus was full of grace and truth (John 1:14). Tim Keller said, "If you truly care about truth, you will want people to believe it. Say it, then, in a way that makes it as hearable as possible. Words take craftsmanship. You need truthful words. You need kind and gentle words. And you need apt, appropriate, beautiful words."[4] That is a great reminder for us as we seek to love and stand for true, sound doctrine. And we should do so humbly, knowing that apart from the Holy Spirit, we would be led into error.

Read 2 Timothy 2:1-7.

Paul told Timothy to be strong in God's grace, which reveals a beautiful mystery. Grace is not about our strength or power, and yet the command is for us to "be strong" (2 Tim. 2:1). We see something similar in chapter 1, where Paul says that God is able to guard what had been entrusted to him (2 Tim. 1:12), but then commands Timothy to guard the good deposit (2 Tim. 1:14). These are just two of the many instances in the Bible which remind us that we are totally dependent upon God, and yet we still have an active role to play. We want a faith that is working through love (Gal. 5:6), and we ought to work out our salvation, for it is God who works in us (Phil. 2:12-13). Paul said he worked harder than any other apostle, yet it was not him; rather, it was the grace of God with him (1 Cor. 15:10). What a mystery, but one thing is clear—our dependence is not passive in any way.

▪ What can you do to be strong in God's grace?

Within the letter of 2 Timothy, there are a number of examples of how to "be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus" (2:10). We should use our spiritual gifts (1:6), focus on the priorities of Jesus (2:4), remember Jesus' example (2:8), flee youthful passions, and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace (2:22), avoid quarreling and arguing (2:23), imitate godly examples (3:14-15), and live by the Scriptures (3:16).

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
God empowers church leaders to proclaim and guard the gospel.

2 Timothy

1:13-14. It is not enough that Timothy just believes the truth; the spirit in which he does it matters to God as well. William Mounce says, "It is not sufficient merely to hold to the gospel. How one holds to the gospel is also significant, and Timothy must be sure that his ministry is characterized by faith and love." He continues by insightfully noting that "just as Timothy is called to suffer for the gospel not by his own strength but by the power of God, so also this faith and love are not inherent qualities, but rather supernatural gifts given to those who are 'in Christ Jesus.'"[5]

2:1-7. "The ability to teach entails three basic elements: a knowledge of Scripture, the readiness to teach, and the ability to communicate. This doesn't mean that an elder must be an eloquent orator, a dynamic lecturer or a highly gifted teacher (of which there are very few), but an elder must know the Bible and be able to instruct others from it."[6]

2:3. "Once Paul gives Timothy the charge to make disciples who make disciples, the very next thing he says is "Share in suffering." And should we really be surprised? The Master disciple-maker was put to death on a cross. And Timothy's own discipler is writing this letter to him from prison. Paul wasn't in prison just for being a disciple of Jesus. If he would have just loved Jesus and kept it to himself, no one would have bothered to go to all the trouble to put Paul into prison. But what got him locked up was that he made disciples of Jesus."[7].

2:4-6. Paul uses three examples—a soldier, an athlete, and a farmer. The soldier teaches us to focus on the priorities of our King and the heavenly kingdom we serve. It is so easy to get distracted and tangled up in other pursuits that are less important. The athlete teaches us to live with holy discipline, in a manner fit for someone who is running a spiritual race. There's a tendency to cut corners, whether morally or methodologically, but we must run in accordance with the law of Christ. The farmer teaches us that we will reap if we do not give up. Our faithfulness will bear fruit, our labor will not be in vain, and we will not lose our reward.

4. Tim Keller, Twitter post, August 6, 2018, 6:11 a.m., https://twitter.com/timkellernyc/status/1026425403416764417

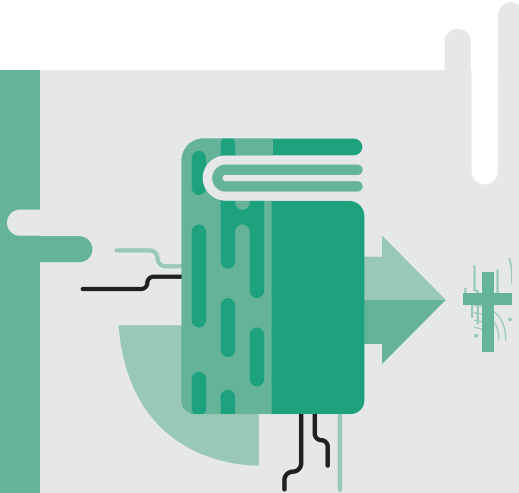
5. William D. Mounce, Word Biblical Commentary Vol. 46, Pastoral Epistles (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2000). .

6. Alexander Strauch, Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership (Colorado Springs, CO: Lewis and Roth Publishers; Rev Exp Edition, 2003).

7. David Mathis, "The Cost of Disciple-Making," Desiring God, January 30, 2017, https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/the-cost-of-disciple-making.

(p. 74, DDG) Christ Connection

Near the end of his life, Paul wrote to Timothy, one of his closest partners in ministry. Paul instructed Timothy on how to fulfill his calling as a leader in the church by living unashamed of the gospel, faithfully preaching the gospel, and finding strength in Christ. Because Jesus died to serve the church, pastors and leaders are called to live sacrificially to serve the church as well.



LIFEWISE
Middle School

LESSON 95: COMMITMENT
UNITED UNDER GODLY LEADER

2 Timothy 1:8-14, 2:1-7

UNITED UNDER GODLY LEADERS

God empowers church leaders to proclaim and guard the gospel.

JESUS CONNECTION

Paul instructed Timothy to lead the church well by finding strength in Christ, living unashamed of the gospel and faithfully preaching the good news. Because Jesus died to serve the church, pastors and leaders are called to live sacrificially to serve the church as well.

LIFEWISE QUALITY

COMMITMENT – Doing what I say I'll do.

HEAD

Why isn't Paul ashamed of the gospel message?

What did Paul advise Timothy to do when he experiences suffering?

HEART

Jesus was willing to be mistreated and even killed to save us from our sins. How does His example help you keep your commitments, even when you get discouraged?

What do you think it means to make a commitment to follow Jesus? If you haven't made that commitment, what is holding you back?

HANDS

Make a list of your commitments (school, extracurricular activities, home life, relationships, etc.). Choose one commitment that you struggle to keep. Follow the AIM approach below:

- A – Ask. Ask God to give you the strength and determination to keep your commitment.

- I – Identify barriers. Write down 1–2 specific roadblocks that hold you back from keeping this commitment. For each roadblock, write down a specific solution. Ask someone you trust to help you brainstorm ideas, if needed.

- M – Make a plan. Create a plan to do this week. Post it for yourself to see and ask someone you trust to hold you accountable. Pray that God would give you the strength and determination to keep this commitment. After a week, tell your accountability partner how it went.